

THE LONG TOM RIFLE IN NEW ZEALAND SERVICE - BUTT TANG MARKINGS

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Over twenty years ago the writer started researching the history of the Long Tom Rifle in New Zealand Service and two articles have arisen from this research. The problem with an enquiring mind is that it demands answers to questions and the New Zealand Butt Tang markings and their decoding is not assisted by the lack of archival evidence, questions to fellow researchers and collectors etc. have at times been met with a shrug. Some answers were partially met in the initial article regarding those marked 1901; C14 and E14 but as time went on more sightings and questions arose about other markings along with more information on the initial three. No longer is one required to go to a suitable library to read the Defence Reports as they are now on line but other documents still require research at Archives NZ – Wellington and many regrettably have been consigned to landfill over the years.



WWI it was reported only 16% were fit for Musketry Practice due to the wartime shortage of replacement parts.

03, rack numbers noted 18354 – 19132

04, rack numbers noted 19347 – 20286

The Imperial manufacture of the then new Magazine Rifle that included the Magazine Lee Metford Marks I & II (MLM Mk I & II) and the Magazine Lee Enfield Mk 1 & 1* (MLE Mk I & I*) had a long tang as part of the Butt Plate that was to be used for regimental markings and when that rifle was taken on charge by the New Zealand Government various markings were used to denote government ownership, rack numbers and batch etc. – it is these markings this article aims to try and address.



All the New Zealand military Rifles had the Government ownership marks of N↑Z along with various dates and rack numbers applied as follows: -

1901, rack numbers noted from 633 – 18242. These were the newish rifles arriving with returning Kiwi troops from the Boer War in South Africa plus additional new rifles ordered direct from Britain and manufactured by BSA Co. dated 1901. The majority of these 1901 marked arms went to the Volunteers (later called Territorial's) and towards the end of

06, rack numbers noted 20303 – 20751.

The 03, 04 and 06 dated are from what I call 'the trickle' of new arms used to create the Reserve of Arms being formed as noted in the 1904 Defence Report

13, rack numbers noted 20809 – 20982

14, rack numbers noted 21013- 24058. The 13 and 14

dated weapons are part of the 15,000 buy from England of which 5,000 were new rifles, presumably from War Reserve stocks being released as the supply of SMLE's for the Imperial Army grew.

With regards to the new rifles, these were sequentially numbered and I would expect they started in 1901 at 1 although current sightings start at 633; lower numbers have not been sighted. This sequential number series went through all the new rifle buys up to and including the 14 purchase. If we add the 5000 new rifles purchased in 1913 - 14 to the highest 13 numbered, 20982 I would expect our highest 14 numbered rifle to be in the late 25k range and may even be in the 26k range and still awaiting discovery.

E13, rack numbers noted 107 – 3443. From sightings it appears there was included a batch MLM Mk II that are marked E13, some noted having been upgraded with replacement Enfield barrels marked '12 and '13 signifying manufactured in either 1912 or 1913 along with E (Enfield rifling) stamped on the Knox Form and presumably fitted during their refurbishment for the New Zealand contract. Many of the MLM noted with Brass Butt Plate Screws not the usual steel.

E14, rack numbers noted 3593 – 8930. The E13 and E14 marked rifles were part of the 15,000 buy from England of which 10,000 were refurbished used weapons. Some arrived in New Zealand in late 1913 and the remainder in early 1914 depending on when shipped and although different year codes applied the rack numbers appear sequential regardless of year.



Today there are few 13, 14, E13 and E14 rifles remaining and it is understood that these new and refurbished rifles armed the WWI NZEF Main Body and early Reinforcements that departed New Zealand in 1914/15 and were either lost at Gallipoli or swapped in early 1916 with the Egypt garrison based British 11th Division upon the formation of the New Zealand Division and its transfer to the Western Front.

In 2006 the writer located two NZ marked E14 ground dug Butt Plates in a private museum on the Gallipoli Peninsular at Alcitepe (formally Krithia)

near the infamous Daisy Patch in the Helles area where so many lives were lost. Although poorly displayed and hard to see in their un-cleaned condition behind glass along with others, two were certainly formally NZ owned.

Another example is the Turkish rebuilt rifle called an "Enfauser" by collectors, it has a MLE Butt and Plate marked N↑Z/14/22829 (right) with a SMLE Enfield 1908 Action marked NZ/1360/11 mated with a Turkish marked Mauser barrel and barrel bands, along with a modified Enfield fore-end, apparently Turkish assembled and converted from battlefield clearance pick-ups. Of recent years some noted for sale in the American market.



C14, rack numbers noted 16 – 14799. This is the 15,000 second hand part worn rifles purchased from Canada for \$1 Canadian Dollar each. These rifles were initially part of the Canadian 1896 purchase from England and would be MLE Mk I as the Cleaning Rods were not abolished until May 1899. This is usually confirmed by the Cleaning Rod groove in the fore-end woodwork if the rifle remains in original issued condition. Many of these C14 rifles also have on the upper right hand side of the butt the stamped initials of M&D standing for Canada's, Militia and Defence. The majority of these C14 were issued to the NZ Cadet Force.



R, rack numbers sighted (6), R927 – R3507. This is a completely new research area. An interesting Butt marking (plate only) is that of R1493/N↑Z with N↑Z added later, there are three other local sightings of R marked Butts numbered R927, R1954 and R2401, however the latter two the NZ ownership markings are not on the Butt Tang but on the right hand side of the Butt Socket like the later, early issued SMLE but without the Broad Arrow.



These two weapons are manufactured as Lee Speed Patents by B.S.A. Co., R2401 was issued by the NZ Defence Storekeeper July 11th 1902 to 2604 Trooper A T Hawkins late 5th Contingent. R927 with no NZ markings is a BSA No. 3 Trade Pattern Carbine Lee Speed that has been sported, marked on wood of Butt, A.D.Retter (possibly 2288 Trooper A Retter 5th Contingent). My deduction from this bring back is that a number were issued in Rhodesia that gave rise to the false reports that the LEC/88 (NZ) (aka NZ Carbine) was used in Boer War; which it certainly was not, a case of mistaken identity.

Another is R1526 without NZ markings; it has 'Stock Art' with Australian province. The R abbreviation marking possibly stands for Rhodesia where arms were purchased by the British South Africa Company (BSAC) and reimbursed by the Imperial Government to mount operations from the north into South Africa as part of the Rhodesian Field Force (RFF) under General Carrington during the Boer War that included New Zealand and Australian Colonial Contingents. 'The 4th and 5th NZ Contingents on June 1 1900 whilst at Marandellas Rhodesia swapped their Martini Enfield Carbines and Rifles they had taken from NZ for Magazine Lee Enfield Rifles'. But the Special

Correspondent with the 5th Contingent reported, 'On arriving at Bamboo Creek, one of our halting-places on the journey, every man was supplied with a Lee-Speed magazine rifle. The Lee Speed is a Lee Metford with one or two slight alterations.' Both statements are possibly correct as the NZ Contingent Companies were dispatched from Beira to Rhodesia over a period of time as the Bamboo Creek Railway was a choke point to the flow of both troops and supplies. Whilst not proven I wonder if the reason 1901 Rack numbers below 633 have not been sighted is that the numbering (at least on paper) initially commenced with the R series Lee Speeds where there was no room on the Tang without removal of the R number for another Rack Number. These most likely would have been the first of the official rifles arriving with returning troops at the expiration of their twelve months Active Service in the Field plus travel contract in mid 1901. However the total number of the 4th and 5th plus Reserves is 1076 NZ embarkations even allowing for casualties, transfers at end of contract to other contingents, discharged overseas etc. the returning numbers would still be in excess of 633. But maybe there was a mix of R marked Lee Speeds and unmarked War Office Lee Enfield's issued as indicated in the two above statements? The latter later being NZ marked and rack numbered.

Noted in Imperial Army Orders, Appendix IX, 1. – 'Marking of arms issued from store for other than ordinary service. (v) Arms held for mobilisation (For Infantry and A.O.C. Reservists). Will be marked with corps marks and consecutive numbers, the latter being proceeded by the letter R.' The writers contention is that this R reference can be discounted in respect to the above R sightings as they do not have a Corps marking as well and the instructions would only apply to the Imperial Government manufactured and owned Rifles not the civilian made Lee Speed Rifles as purchased by the private company – BSAC.

UNMARKED

Finally there is the unmarked Butt Tang (apart from the usual manufactures marks) i.e. as manufactured, not skimmed or erased. I suspect these are the rifles of the 7th NZ Contingent returning on the Troopship *Manila* who upon learning they could not retain their arms as Seddon the PM had promised a year earlier broke into the ships armoury and seized their former weapons and took them home. Few were able to give the slightest assistance in identifying or retrieving the

missing weapons! As a result these Rifles were never officially marked and remained blank.

ANNOMOLIES

During this research a small number of sightings outside those quoted above have been noted and upon investigation have been treated as aberrations due to poor or worn striking or human frailty like typos and in recording of numbers like 0,3,5,6,8,9 etc. except for a few that have a later accession date but an early lower Rack Number like N↑Z/14/8165/S in the writer's collection. These later ones are explained as the odd replacement for a rifle that has been either lost or damaged beyond repair and so the rack number has been reallocated to the replacement and the later date noted.

Also noted during my research there were a large number of rifles with Butt Plates with a different manufacturer's view marks to the barrelled actions, like a London Small Arms (LSA) Butt Plate and an Enfield made rifle. On the Butt Tang adjacent to the top smaller screw are usually located the Manufactures inspection marks like Crown over X for LSA. Over one hundred years since manufactured, weapons have been repaired by both the military and civilian armourers plus some collectors swapping plates to enhance their rifle, so worthy of closer inspection as one would not expect to find a C14 with a manufacturers date other than 1896 when Canada ordered 40,000 Magazine Lee Enfield's from England. Or the later converted in 1920 for the Defence Rifle Clubs weapons with the BSA Commercial HV Barrelled Action.

As an aside, during this research it was noted that there are a few consecutively Rack numbered rifles still out there in the community after all these years! The majority of surviving Rifles sighted today have either the 1901 or C14 markings.

So why bother to code and mark our various rifle buys as outlined above? Obviously there was the need for the Government ownership mark of N↑Z and a Rack Number, but what of the rest? I believe we get an good indication of the rational from the 1921 NZ Armours instruction, "Marking of Rifles, S.M.L.E., and Bayonets, ... As regards the sword-bayonet it is considered unnecessary to record the month and year, as wear-and-tear and damage do not occur to the same extent as the rifle." Also noted in Imperial Army Orders 1st May 1912, Appendix IX. 2. Marking of Arms issued from store for Ordinary Service. 'Number of month and year of issue.' A couple examples of this type of marking are two private NZ

Trooper bring backs from Boer War marked on the Butt Disk, a MECC, 9/1899/5.A.S.C./33 and a LECC, 10.99/2.D [Dragoons]/734. The writer's deduction from this is that with the normal service wear-and-tear to rifles armourers needed to be able to tell at a glance what was the age and history of the rifle, was it new when it entered NZ service between 1901 and 1914, a refurbished rifle marked E13 or E14 or a second-hand rifle marked C14 and after inspection to be repaired accordingly. Excessive damage when noted after considering the markings may give rise to a unit or soldier needing to explain after the raising of a Misuse and Neglect Report by the Armourer. Within the above markings variations occur due to different Armours, the size of letter and number stamps including the Broad Arrow and formatting.



During the NZ service of the Long Tom many were sold off to members of the Defence Rifle Clubs and were marked in various ways with the Sold out of Service (SoS) or Disposal Marks which is usually opposing Broad Arrows with one or two S's like thus, →S← or S→←S and →←. A review of these sold Butt Tangs shows many different methods used depending on the armourer at the time of disposal. Some Tangs had all or some of the markings roughly ground off, others neatly filed and polished and disposal stamps applied in their various formats.

S, noted on many Tangs the addition of the capital letter S but no archival evidence has so far been located as to its significance. Some speculate the S stood for a South Island arm but I believe this can be discounted in the absence of any marked N for North Island and



there was never a Military District called South Island. Another thought is that it stood for School as in School Cadets, but three I have are S marked on 03, 04, & 06 butts plates respectively, but why send new arms to School Cadets? Cadet arms were usually marked E↑D (Education Department).

Also sighted recently is a NZ Mounted Rifles, Lance, marked; N↑Z/3 S 6, hardly, I suspect Cadet issue kit! Others have advanced the theory it stood for denoting a Short Butt, but all



measurements have discounted this. The final theory is that it was a later abbreviated symbol for Sale not requiring the removal of existing markings to fit in, the writer tends to support this over the others advanced so far. The S marking has also been noted on other NZ marked weapons like the Hay pattern Snider, Snider Carbines dated '87, MH Mk III, MEAC, ME Rifle Mk I, and MLE Mk I*, but we don't have information if they also have the standard Sold out of Service marks. Later the bulk disposal of the Long Toms, no disposal/sale marks were applied presumably due to the sheer number involved and by then they were an obsolete weapon. It is believed that this disposal occurred in the early 1930's but again no evidence appears to have survived.

Notwithstanding all of the above apart from the references noted, no archival evidence has been located to support the deductions reached as to the various codes. But by observation of remaining rifles and parts plus analysis of some surviving reports, on the balance of probabilities the above deductions appear to be the best plausible explanation of the NZ markings of Long Tom Rifles to date.

Should anyone have further observations of different NZ codes or Rack numbers outside the above noted ranges kindly contact the author at nj-taylor@outlook.com

Special thanks to: Greg Lee, Phil Cregeen, Stuart Moody, John Osborne, Len King, Gordon Sylvester, Stuart Wilson and Tony Bruce for their assistance over the years with sightings, comments and useful debate.